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ABSTRACT

Writing figures prominently in accounts of foreign language learning that is specially concerned with promoting the development of learner autonomy. Writing things down plays a prominent role in the autonomous foreign language classroom. The learner texts presented and discussed in this paper invite reflection on three issues of general importance for foreign language teaching: (1) foreign language proficiency involves a great deal more than morphosyntactic accuracy; (2) the cultural component in foreign language learning can never be wholly detached from the cultural competence that all learners have developed in their first language environment; (3) learner texts are assembled in a patchwork fashion, which simultaneously raises issues of intertextuality and the limits of the toleration of plagiarism as a language learning technique. "Writing Strategies in Mother Tongue and Foreign Language Learning: Some Examples from Pupils' Work" is discussed by Laila Aase. "Mother Tongue and Foreign Language Learning: Some Aspects of a Mutual Relationship" is discussed by Turid Trebbi. "Text Competence and the Interrelationship between Mother Tongue and Foreign Language Learning" is discussed by Anne-Brit Fenner. (Contains 32 references.) (KFT)

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Writing as cultural competence: a study of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning within a framework of learner autonomy

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Writing as cultural competence: a study of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning within a framework of learner autonomy

Laila Aase, Anne-Brit Fenner, David Little, Turid Trebbi

1 Introduction

David Little

The studies brought together in this paper were provoked by a discussion that took place between the authors at the Fifth Nordic Workshop on Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning, held in Copenhagen in August 1995. The general framework for the discussion was provided by the definition of learner autonomy drawn up at an earlier Nordic Workshop, held in Bergen in 1989:

> Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person. An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social processes of learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms of what she/he already and uniquely knows. It is essential that an autonomous learner is stimulated to evolve an awareness of the aims and processes of learning and is capable of the critical reflection which syllabuses and curricula frequently require but traditional pedagogical measures rarely achieve. An autonomous learner

> knows how to learn and can use this knowledge in any learning situation she/he may encounter at any stage in his/her life. (Bergen 1990, p.102)

Writing figures prominently in accounts of foreign language pedagogy that is specially concerned to promote the development of learner autonomy (see, e.g., Dam 1995, 2000, Thomsen 2000, Seeman and Tavares 2000). Posters, for example, are used to display a wide variety of information – the learning targets the class has set itself, vocabulary relevant to those targets, useful learning techniques and activities, homework tasks, criteria for the evaluation of individual and whole-class progress, and so on; and learner journals make it possible to combine some of the same material with individual reflection and self-evaluation. This use of writing serves three essential pedagogical purposes. First, by providing learners with prompts and reminders it supports their efforts to speak the target language, especially in the very early stages of learning; secondly, it enables learners to focus on the forms of the target language and thus encourages the development of metalinguistic awareness (cf. Olson 1991); and thirdly, it allows learners to detach themselves from their developing proficiency and thus facilitates self-evaluation. This was the starting point of our Copenhagen discussion, which went on to speculate on the role that creative writing can play in the development of foreign language proficiency and learner autonomy. The three studies that follow continue the discussion by exploring how, when required to choose and shape their own creative writing tasks, learners in Norwegian foreign language classrooms embarked on voyages of self-discovery that led them to produce always interesting and sometimes arrestingly mature and effective texts.

The relation between language and thought is complex and controversial (for a recent overview, see Carruthers and Boucher 1999). It is nevertheless a common experience that the process of writing plays an indispensable role in stimulating and giving shape and direction to certain kinds of thinking. Clark (1997, pp.207f.) describes this experience as "the mangrove effect":

> If a tree is seen growing on an island, which do you suppose came first? It is natural (and usually correct) to assume that the island provided the fertile soil in which a lucky seed came to rest. Mangrove forests, however, constitute a revealing exception to this general rule.

> The mangrove grows from a floating seed which establishes itself in the water, rooting in shallow mud flats. The seedling sends complex vertical roots through the surface of the water, culminating in what looks to all intents and purposes like a small tree posing on stilts. The complex system of aerial roots, however, soon traps floating soil, weeds, and debris. After a time, the accumulation of trapped matter forms a small island. As more time passes, the island grows larger and larger. A growing mass of such islands can eventually merge, effectively extending the shoreline out to the trees. Throughout this process, and despite our prior intuitions, it is the land that is progressively built by the trees.
>
> Something like the "mangrove effect", I suspect, is operative in some species of human thought. It is natural to suppose that words are always rooted in the fertile soil of preexisting thoughts. But sometimes, at least, the influence seems to run in the other direction. A simple example is poetry. In constructing a poem, we do not simply use words to express thoughts. Rather, it is often the properties of the words (their structure and cadence) that determine the thoughts that the poem comes to express.

Clark's "mangrove effect" helps to explain why writing things down plays such an important role in the autonomous foreign language classroom. It also illuminates the nature of the text production process captured in the studies that follow.

As a creative process of self-discovery, writing is necessarily parasitic on reading: learners create texts using the knowledge of genre, appropriate style, and narrative and descriptive effects that can come to them only through reading. In the foreign language classroom, creative writing tasks offer them an opportunity to learn by exploiting the text competence that is part of their first language proficiency. Sometimes this L1 text competence may be only partially appropriate to creative writing in the target language, but it allows learners to create a space within which their linguistic competence can grow (cf. the use of L2 words to activate L1 knowledge schemata in order to assist learners' comprehension of authentic L2 texts, discussed by Little 1994).

The learner texts presented and discussed in this paper invite reflection on three issues of general importance for foreign language teaching. First, they remind us that foreign language proficiency involves a great deal more than morphosyntactic accuracy. More specifically, they

display a degree of text competence that lends weight to the more differentiated and complex approach to the definition of proficiency that is now commonplace in the language testing literature (see, e.g., Bachman 1990, Council of Europe 1996). Secondly, our learner texts remind us that the cultural component in foreign language learning can never be wholly detached from the cultural competence that learners have developed in their L1 environment. This fact emphasizes the importance of elaborating curricula that explicitly provide for fruitful interaction between mother tongue and foreign language teaching. Thirdly, it is clear that two of our learner texts were assembled in patchwork fashion, drawing on textbook dialogues in one case and texts found in a CD-ROM encyclopaedia in the other. At one level this raises interesting and complex issues of intertextuality; at another level it confirms that plagiarism can play an important role in language learning and challenges us to consider how far we can legitimize plagiarism as a language learning technique. Besides prompting reflection of this kind, our learner texts confirm the effectiveness of pedagogical measures designed to promote the development of learner autonomy. In particular, they show that when learners are required to make use of what they already know, they can surprise their teachers – and perhaps also themselves – with the richness and complexity of their internal resources.

2 Writing strategies in mother tongue and foreign language learning - some examples from pupils' work

Laila Aase

It may seem obvious that learning a foreign language in many ways depends on cultural and linguistic skills in the mother tongue. The learner is not a beginner at language learning, since he already has a broad knowledge and experience of oral and written language that will form an important background for his experience with the target language. Meeting a new language can, and probably will, provide a broader understanding of both linguistic and metalinguistic aspects of language, merely through new ways of understanding and using language. Thus the foreign language learner might get both a revised understanding of his mother tongue and knowledge of the target language at the same time. If language learning is a cultural meeting, it

is not just because the learner gets to know foreign customs and living styles. The learner also acquires a new means of self-expression using the foreign language, and the possibilities will be different in different languages. Experimenting with expression in a foreign language implies a contrastive perspective. The learner must ask himself: what are the similarities and differences between his mother tongue and the target language? Linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge developed in the mother tongue will always play a part in L2 learning, not only in terms of background knowledge, but also as a dynamic reference for comparing the two languages. This reciprocal way of looking upon the connections between mother tongue and L2 learning might seem logical, but nevertheless has so far had little impact on L2 teaching.

This section will focus on how linguistic and cultural competence developed through the mother tongue can influence L2 learning. The examples used to illustrate the discussion are confined to written texts, but the study of oral texts will no doubt demonstrate similar connections. The young language learner using the target language will always be in the situation where he is dealing with texts and discourse – in other words, super-structures expressing meaning in a broad sense. The words uttered will always mean more than they say, depending on context. And context is constructed through an interpretation of the situation by the participants depending on personal experience and historically formed cultural norms. In the mother tongue even very young children master the language in the sense that they know not only what words and utterances mean, but how, why and in what style and circumstances they can be used. We realize, of course, that this competence is dependent on cultural capital, and that it will vary a lot from individual to individual for a complex range of reasons. Nevertheless, each person will acquire this competence to a certain extent in his own language. The young L2 learner, on the other hand, will often have problems transferring these metalinguistic skills to the target language. He may have a sufficient vocabulary and good enough grammar skills, but may lack the tools for using a style of expression that reflects a cultural understanding of the communicative situation. Frequently he may lack target language models for the text he is trying to produce, and then he will resort to drawing on his mother tongue text competence to find a solution. These strategies will often be obvious in a learner text, and may provide interesting information to the teacher.

The competence to produce a text that includes both linguistic and

metalinguistic skills will here be referred to as text competence. This is not a concept that allows us to measure particular linguistic skills. It emphasizes instead the importance of seeing language in use as text reflecting a wide and complex pattern of cultural signs. This complexity of text is an integral part of language learning which one cannot avoid. Nevertheless, traditional teaching approaches have often tried to do exactly that by constructing pedagogical texts, on the grounds that such texts can be used to clarify certain linguistic features while avoiding the social and cultural aspects of the language, and can thus simplify the learning process. Against this position, however, there have been some strong arguments, particularly those supporting the use of authentic texts. A few of the main points are summarized and emphasized here.

Participation in discourse cannot be disjoined from the complexity of context. One might ask whether context-free pedagogical texts indeed fulfil the function they are meant to have. From my own school days I remember some of the sentences from my French beginner's textbook (e.g., "le lion est fier", "le vent souffle") as utterances with a certain poetic and perhaps slightly absurd resonance. All these isolated sentences inevitably trigger a natural desire to know "*Where* or *when* or *why* was this utterance made, and by *whom*?" The mystery of these unanswered questions might be the reason why I remember these sentences so many years later. The point I am trying to make here is that pedagogical texts can never be completely isolated from context even if they are created for that purpose. We simply have a need to experience language in context, and if the context is not provided, we create it.

So what is wrong then with a text specially constructed for a pedagogical purpose? The problem is that it has limited semiotic value since it has no reference to a meaningful context. In contrast, an authentic text can do much more than illustrate a few linguistic points since it is also an example of how language is used in a particular situation and therefore provides a far more suitable model for the learner. An authentic text embodies the complexity of language in communication and thus enables the learner to acquire knowledge about much more than just particular linguistic features.

The learner will normally have developed his text competence in his mother tongue, although this might not always be the case. In both second and foreign language learning, we sometimes come across learners who to a large extent develop a specific text competence that they do not have in their mother tongue, through working with model

texts in the target language. In Norway, where children start learning English at an early age, we sometimes see how their notion of text can develop as much through their work in English as in their mother tongue, and how their model text might just as often be English as Norwegian. Normally, however, learners have a more developed text competence in their mother tongue. A child who has mastered the ability to compose a text in his own language observing local and global coherence will usually be able to use this knowledge when writing in a foreign language. In fact, transferring such knowledge will often be his only option, since very few foreign language teachers will explicitly teach the linguistic and metalinguistic skills of text composition. Such skills are generally taken for granted by foreign language teachers, even though what learners actually produce might often suggest that they lack the necessary text competence for the prescribed task. It may be that many teachers do not stop to ask themselves why learners succeed or fail in composing good texts in the target language when they have had no specific instructional help for the writing task. We suggest that L2 learners are much more dependent on their mother tongue text competence than is normally acknowledged. We furthermore propose that L2 teaching can benefit from examining the connections between the two languages through a close reading of learner-produced texts.

In what follows, I shall give two examples of student work that illustrate how a general sense of style and a knowledge of written text genres may influence composition skills in the foreign language. In the first example, a learner in a Norwegian 8th grade class (14 years old) has been asked to write an English version of a fairytale. He chooses Hans Christian Anderson's well-known fairytale, "The Emperor's New Clothes". The learner does not have the Norwegian version of the text in front of him but writes from memory. He writes two versions of the text, the first draft being merely a summary of the content, and the second draft a completely different kind of text which tells the story in verse. In this way, the learner sets himself a task which is not simply an English writing exercise but is concerned specifically with the properties of text and style. We may wonder whether the teacher appreciates this or indeed notices it all. If the teacher's intention was to have the learner practise his writing (in the sense of writing English without errors), she might not appreciate the task the learner has given himself. After all, the rhetorical and textual aspects of writing tend not to play an important role in most L2 classrooms.

A comparison of the two draft texts will give us an idea of what the learner was trying to do, and why he found it necessary to do something that was in fact more difficult than it had to be. It is obvious that the first draft would have been adequate as a normal piece of student work at this level (8th grade), especially if the learner had been capable of writing without spelling mistakes.

1st Draft

The Emperor's new clothes.

Once upon a time, there was an emperor who whas so vain and selfish that evrybody had to agree with evrything he said or did.

He liked to show off to evrybody and he was never wearing the same clothes twice. A talor had heard of this emperor, and desided to play him a trick. He went to the emperor, and told him that he had the most wonderfull cloth. He said that it was so delicate that only the most noble people could see or feel it. Then he pretended that he took up a material from his bag.

Of course the emperor couldn't see anything but he pretended he could. He didn't want to be regarded as unnobel. He was going to have a procession, and the tailor promised to make him a new dress. When the clothes where ready the tailor had "dressed" the emperor. The court thought it looked a bit strange when he came out naked, but they didn't dear to say anything. So did evryone else, but noone wanted to make a fool of him self. So nobody metioned the emperor's nudeness untill a little boy who was whatching cried out: "The emperor has no clothes! He's naked".

At once it got all silent, but after a little while somebody started laugh. Soon the whole crowd where laughing. The emperor was furious, but the tailor was allready far away.

2nd Draft

The Emperor's new clothes.

Once upon a time, in a country far away
Where it really was is hard to say

There lived a mighty emperor, particulary vain.
The people that he ruled, often said he was insane.
He changed his clothing twice a day
And acted in a striking way.
The rumor of his vanity was spreading very fast.
It reached an inn at last.
In the darkest corner of the inn there sat a cunning sailor.
He decidied to set up to be regarded as a tailor.
He went up to the palace, in disguise
And offered som material worth its price.
The clothing he offered was of a special kind,
That only could be seen by people with good mind.
The stupid, the incompetent, the silly and the dum,
Couldn't see his material, because they all where skum.
This is what he made them belive,
Because he was a master to decive.
He spent the week working, well payed.
Nobody dared to question his trade.
The emperor asked his court what they thought
Of the "wonderfull" clothes that he had bought.
"Wonderfull, marvelous and extraordinarily nice",
The said, and ment that it was worth it's price.
When the tailor said that the clothes where ready made,
He decided to wear them at next parade.
The rumor of these special clothes,
Made people gaether along the roads.
The people where praising and shouting with joy
Untill they suddenly heard a little boy:
"The emperor has no clothes on"
At once all the joy was gone.
The emperor turned shyer and shyer
He swore he would get hold of that liar.
When he got home, the sailor was gone.
Where he went, knows none.

An obvious question to ask is why the learner feels a need to change genre. Why does it feel better to transform the text into a narrative poem? One reason may be, as he himself explained, that he felt the first draft to be boring. The next question, of course, is why it seemed boring to him,

and why he preferred to do something that took a lot more work. One answer could be that he realized how his first text lacked all the atmosphere and linguistic skill of the original text, which of course is true. The first draft is a faint version of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale. The story is recounted, but the magic is gone. Andersen's fairytales all have an elegance of style and a slightly ironic tone that is hard to translate even for a professional translator.

We do not know the pedagogical purposes of this writing task. Was there, for instance, an explicit intention connected with the fairytale genre? Did the teacher merely want her pupils to write a story/text in English? Did she want them to practise certain grammatical features? Did she want them to discover certain difficulties or possibilities in translating a well-known text from Norwegian into English? We cannot answer these questions, but we can see what the boy did, and thus draw some hypotheses from analysing what we can observe.

My main point is that the learner saw very clearly that the first text he produced was inadequate compared to what he wanted to write. And this is where his text competence comes in. He knows that writing a fairytale is not just a question of re-telling a series of events. The whole point is *how* these events are told. And how it is told gives a certain style and a certain atmosphere to the text. Because the learner knows the story and the style so well, he also knows that his first draft is not good enough for his purposes and does not match up to what he wants. This is what he means by saying it is boring. So what does he do? He looks for another way of expressing a desired style and atmosphere. Improving and rewriting the first draft would have meant putting in more details, finding better expressions and looking for more elegant ways of saying things – a difficult task for a boy of 14 who has limited mastery of the English language and has read far too little to achieve a sense of style in English. So what he does to achieve a similar effect is rather interesting. He changes genre and chooses a poem with a rather free rhythm that gives him scope to tell a story without having to think too much about poetic form. At the same time, this provides an easy and humorous way of recounting the story in an appropriate narrative style. It may not be the style of the original text, but it has a similarly humorous and ironic touch.

The task itself is interesting because it is an example of the kind of creativity we sometimes see when learners are already provided with the content and can therefore concentrate fully on form. Often in writing tasks where the learner has to invent both form and content, much of the

effort becomes devoted to thinking up the content. In the case under discussion, the story is well-known to both writer and potential readers, and the learner consequently knows that he should concentrate on style and form.

As teachers we surely find it interesting when a learner puts more work into an assignment than he has to, in order to produce something that seems to him of better quality or more fun to do. This is no doubt an example of what Nystrand and Gamoran (1989) call *substantive engagement* in contrast to *procedural engagement*. Substantive engagement happens, for example, when students write what they call "position papers" to articulate points of view they want to take in class discussions – in other words, papers where they express personal ideas. Nystrand and Gamoran point out that authenticity in this kind of work will be high because it is open to the student to decide on content and because the student has got something to say. It may seem that Nystrand and Gamoran connect substantive engagement here with content (of a text or utterance). This is understandable since very often a learner's engagement will arise in relation to content on the basis of what Smidt (1989) calls *personal relevance*. In our example, however, the situation is different. What promotes substantive engagement is not the pleasure of expressing a personal meaning or tackling a topic of interest. Rather, what seems to inspire the learner is the enjoyment of engaging with text, style and language in order to obtain a desired effect. As teachers, we surely need to understand why a learner may find it motivating to engage with written communication on this level. We may need to realize that writing can have an importance for the learner which goes beyond the confines of tasks prescribed in school, and which is part of the process of socialization into literary and cultural forms. The learner develops as an individual and a social being by navigating in a cultural landscape already made but not frozen. His experience with language through interactions with texts and with people plays an important role in this development. Barton (1994) calls this an *ecological* perspective on written language, while Smidt emphasizes the connections between individual and social development in the process of learning to write:

> To understand how individual pupils develop as writers implies seeing how they interpret the social world filled with language and signs – as pupils in schools and in all their other social roles. To develop an identity as a writer is as much a social as a psychological

process. (Smidt 1996, p.45; my translation)

The question is whether the teacher is able to see what the learner does and to appreciate the result. If the teacher is mainly concerned about the learner's ability to write correctly, she will not be interested in a student project of this level. She might not even see the qualitative difference between the first and second drafts of "The Emperor's New Clothes". Both drafts, after all, contain spelling mistakes and might not seem very different to a teacher whose primary concern is to check for correct spelling. In fact, there are more mistakes in the story in verse, where the learner is trying out a broader vocabulary.

The ability to write a text depends on a complex pattern of skills on different levels, the most demanding being the skill of inventing or creating the content. This requires cultural competence, including discourse competence, and is likely to engage all the writer's efforts to begin with. Then comes knowledge of text, composition, and alternative possibilities of style and genre in relation to different purposes. After that comes the choice of words and phrases that give the text colour and texture. And last come the skills of constructing grammatically correct sentences and spelling words accurately. All these skills are needed in both L1 writing and L2 writing, although the L2 learner might not be fully aware of this. The learner who writes a text in a foreign language bases his strategies on mother tongue experiences and would normally derive most of his model texts from the mother tongue. Yet the question is whether this is thoroughly understood in L2 teaching and taken into account in L2 writing lessons. One suspects that L2 writing lessons often deal with only the last set of skills mentioned above, namely the skills of writing sentences that are grammatically and structurally correct and of producing a rich vocabulary that is accurately spelt. If this is true, writing in a foreign language comes to be viewed as something much narrower in scope than writing in the mother tongue, with the result that teachers overlook important and interesting aspects of L2 texts produced by learners.

In L2 teaching, we must ask, as we do in L1 teaching, what is a good student text? The answer will of course vary according to student age and text type. Nevertheless, we should concern ourselves with the question. One way of looking at the student text might be in relation to the following levels:

1. *The level of communication* – How does the student include a sense of the reader in his text? How does he deal with differences between oral and written text? How does he choose content to express and clarify his intentions? Does the choice of genre seem functionally appropriate to the purpose?
2. *The level of text* – What are the student's notions of a text: composition, genre, style? Is there a unity of ideas or a "red thread"? How does the student connect sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into text?
3. *The level of sentences* – Does the student show a feeling for sentences and know when to use punctuation? Are the sentences logical and grammatical? How does the student use sentences to vary the rhythm of the text?
4. *The level of vocabulary* – How does the student use vocabulary to express nuances and give the text atmosphere? How good is his spelling?
(Skjelbred 1992)

We may sometimes feel that teachers are too concerned with the last two levels of text, and too little concerned with the first and second levels. If this is true, L2 teaching in schools is limiting its focus to a much narrower aspect of communication than what learners engage in when they use the target language. Any utterance, after all, is a text, and a text comprises much more than just sentences and words.

To be able to produce a text, the writer has to know how a text can be made and what it should look like. In the mother tongue, text models are built up through socialization and familiarity with culture, and are sometimes not part of the child's conscious knowledge. In the foreign language, on the other hand, the learner is obliged to be more aware of the norms of written text. Sometimes, he may not have access to an appropriate L2 text model and may find that the equivalent text model in his L1 does not fit. For instance, in Norwegian the conventions for written text imply a closer connection with speech, even in the genres of scientific and academic writing, than is the case in English or French. Norwegian children thus have little experience of a writing style that can be somewhat remote from oral language. When they choose to write an L2 text in a genre they are not familiar with, they base their writing on models from Norwegian.

In my second example of learner-produced work, we see how a

student of 12 deals with a task of this kind in English. Here, the learner has read in class Rudyard Kipling's story "The Crab that Played by the Sea". Normally, the class would write answers to questions on the text, both to practise writing skills and to make sure they have understood the text. In this particular lesson, however, there is a substitute teacher who does not know these routines and who simply tells the learners to "write about the text". This is not a familiar task for the class. The learners will have to choose a genre and decide on content. The task "write about" rules out some options like writing a story, dialogue or poem, and suggests that the most obvious choices are to write a résumé, review, report or analysis. The learner in question writes an analysis very similar to the kind he would write in his Norwegian class, pointing out some characteristics of the story, summarizing its content, commenting on some examples of style based on close reading, and concluding with a personal opinion about the story. He has never written a text like this in English, nor come across any text models in English, but he has written several similar texts in Norwegian.

"The Crab that played with the sea"

This myth is a typical legend from The Far East. Both the animales and the geografical names tell us that this is from the area India-Indonesia. There are names like Borneo, Sumatra, Java and "Malazy", which are all from Indonesia. But the story is probably changed, or not very old, because it also mentions places like Florida, Sahara, Himalaye and the Indian Decert, which are very far from each other. Old Myths allways use lokal place-names.

The content of the legend is how the Eldest Magician creates the world and gives all creatures different tasks, and tells them to be obedient to man. But the crab escapes and does things he shouldn't do, he makes enormous tides. The story tells about the negociations between the Eldest Magician and the crab, Pau Amona. The magician wins by giving him gifts. But we end up with tides after all, because man is so lazy.

The story is written like if it was told to one person: "My Best Belowed". The language used in the text seems old-fashioned and poetic. There are lots of repetitions that makes it like a poem. All the animals have

names like "Pau Amama", "Rayah Amana", "Kaban" and "Raja Abdullah". And the words "Kun" and "Paya kun" are often used. This emphasize the old fashion atmosphere. Still the story is told in a rather humorous way.

All societies have creations myths. In Norway we find them both in the old norse religion and in the Bibel. The Bibel is more serious, and God is less like an human being then here. This story is more like we in Norway call a "sagn", A story that explaines why things in nature are like they are, for instance "How the Fox got white tale", or "Why the spider got a cross on his back".

In this story we hear about why the crab looks the way he looks, and why he behaves the way he behaves. I liked this legend very much, it was well written and interesting.

The circumstances in which this unfamiliar L2 writing task was set had a definite impact on the learner's writing strategy. He interprets the task as one similar to those he knows in his mother tongue – for example, "give a résumé of", "explain what happened", "give your opinion of", "tell about". The strategy he uses seems to be related to these kinds of task. A closer look at his text shows us that it has a construction based on answers to the following questions: What kind of text is this? Where is it from? What is it about? How is it told? What comments do you have on substance and form? What is your own opinion? The answers to these implicit questions are not elaborated in detail but mostly conveyed in a few sentences. Yet it is clear that the learner has a developed sense of text composition, and that this skill derives from his mother tongue, since he has never seen any model texts in this genre in English.

It is also interesting to see how the learner depends on his general knowledge when creating the content. He does not know anything about Kipling or his stories, but it is clear to him that this is a story written in the style of a creation myth even if it is not actually one ("it is probably changed or not very old"), and he goes on to explain why he thinks so. His next personal touch is to compare Kipling's story to similar stories he knows from Norwegian culture, and to convey that he is uncertain how to classify this kind of tale. He suggests the Norwegian "sagn" as a possibility, although he has already also used the English terms "legend" and "myth". He obviously does not think they are quite the

same. This comparative grasp clearly shows how the learner readily takes on the role of being a Norwegian writing in English. He is not just a student doing his homework but a reader of a foreign language text expressing his understanding in writing using metalinguistic knowledge.

What can a learner do in a foreign language that he cannot do in his Norwegian mother tongue? The most obvious answer is: he can be a Norwegian and be deeply conscious of this particular fact. He knows, of course, that his teacher is likely to be the only reader of his text, but this does not really matter. Through the text he produces, he is interacting with the story he has read. And this he can do because the story is an authentic English text. The fact that its content is exotic even to an Englishman might even make the Norwegian learner's position more interesting. He likes the story and feels that he has something to say about it because he knows similar yet different stories.

In our opinion, these two examples of learner-produced texts demonstrate two aspects of how learners incorporate their L1 text competence into their L2 writing. In fact, the learners' writing strategies are to a great extent dependent on their general knowledge of text composition and text style, and so, by implication, are their chances of succeeding in writing good L2 texts. The first example above shows how a learner tries to realize a specific style and tell a story in a particular way (working with given content). The second example shows how a learner expresses his own impressions of a text and how he thus deals with both content and form. The autonomy this second learner enjoys in this open situation, however, does not mean total freedom of choice. The text competence he has acquired through twelve years of socialization provides some tools for text composition but also imposes some restrictions. Writing is both a creative activity and an activity constrained by textual conventions of which the writer may or may not be fully conscious. Once content and form have been chosen, there will be certain expectations of structure, style, coherence and elaboration which will frame his work. In L1 writing classes, these aspects are explicitly taught. By learning composition skills through writing and re-writing with consultation and help from peers and teachers, students may achieve a practical understanding of the balance between textual conventions and the possibilities for personal creativity. We think that awareness of this fact is important for any foreign language teacher. There is, of course, an argument here for working with authentic texts as model texts, and we

might also ask whether L2 teaching should devote more emphasis to texts, composition, styles and genres.

3 Mother tongue and foreign language learning – some aspects of a mutual relationship

Turid Trebbi

The study of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language acquisition is firmly grounded in psycholinguistic theories and empirical research. Models of L2 acquisition have derived from theoretical accounts of the child's acquisition of its mother tongue. There is common agreement that, generally speaking, L2 learning goes through the same stages as L1 development, and that a learner of a particular L2 acquires items in roughly the same order as a child acquiring the same language as a mother tongue. Moreover, evidence from error analysis and interlanguage studies suggests that learners' L1 can have a substantial impact on their L2 learning at the syntactic, morphological and phonological levels.

Today there is a renewed interest in this relationship between L1 and L2 development which is no longer restricted to purely psycholinguistic concerns or to investigations about L1 influences on L2 learning. The assumption is rather that there is a bi-directional influence at work, which may be conscious or unconscious. In L1 as well as L2 classrooms, there has been great interest in exploring the nature of this relationship and in understanding how L1 and L2 learning can mutually benefit one other.

In effect, we are witnessing a shift of focus in interlanguage studies from similarities and differences at the sentence level, an essentially grammatical perspective, to a more global view where the rhetorical aspect is taken into consideration. This means that the focus is on language use – in other words, at the level of text – and that the learner's text competence becomes a topic of interest. Moreover, this shift parallels a more general change of perspective concerning the nature of language as such. Greater emphasis is laid on culture as an intrinsic aspect of languages, and language learning is accordingly seen as an ongoing process of developing cross-cultural understanding. International forums like the European Union and the Council of Europe see the

maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity as an urgent issue in today's world. Against this background, recent educational reform programmes make statements to the effect that students should learn more languages. Language learning is thus no longer a simple matter of acquiring the four skills and transferring utterances and content from one code into another, but rather a process of cultural consciousness raising and knowledge building. With the increasing interdependence of nations and peoples, language learning is more often conceived of as a matter of general education and personal development, enabling students not only to assimilate the language presented by the teacher or the textbook but also to develop their text competence and create their own forms of language use. This is of importance in the L2 classroom as well as the L1 classroom. Hence, according to the Norwegian curriculum of 1997, teaching in all language subjects (L1 and L2) is expected to contribute to a common goal of furthering students' text competence. This is in the broad sense of the term, where developing text competence is seen as a process of further socialization and personal involvement.

It is at this point, of course, that mother tongue and foreign language education meet on common ground. To help clarify how both L1 and L2 classrooms can benefit from this somewhat unexpected encounter, an important pedagogical question we should ask ourselves is what kind of relationship we are dealing with.

The purpose of this section is to look into some aspects of this relationship as observed in a beginners' French language classroom in lower comprehensive school in Norway. At this stage of education, French or German are optional subjects and the second foreign language after English, which is compulsory. Instead of French or German, students can choose additional Norwegian, additional English, or project work. Before the reform which took place in 1997 in lower secondary school, students could choose from a number of other options such as football, drama, handicraft, cooking, information technology, or French or German. Over the last twenty years, there has been a marked tendency for students to choose options other than the second foreign language, or to change their mind during the language course and switch to another subject. This seems to happen because they feel unsuccessful as learners of French or German and, more often than not, they experience the subject as boring and unmotivating. It is too early yet to tell whether the reform has changed this situation, which in many respects is unacceptable, especially as language competence has become an educational issue of

vital importance in today's world. More fundamentally, it raises the problem of the accessibility of knowledge in general. It is from this perspective that the discussion here will approach the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning. The discussion will make reference to three different texts written by 13–14-year-old learners in the early stages of learning French.

The learners who produced these texts are working in a self-directed language learning environment which aims to develop their capacity to take charge of their own learning (Holec 1979). This self-directed learning scheme is supported by a focus on learning-to-learn processes, and is an approach that has proved to be of considerable interest in terms of making the second foreign language accessible to students in lower secondary school. A major concern of this learning-to-learn programme is to explore the interrelationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning as evident in what the individual learner brings to the learning situation (Barnes 1976).

All three examples illustrate the problem of exposure to L2 input in the foreign language classroom. Learning is a sequential process and requires exposure to the target language, or in pedagogical terms, to "model texts". Model texts are pieces of language that are brought into the classroom deliberately or randomly. In most L2 classrooms, L2 input is almost exclusively provided by the textbook in a predetermined sequence of selected language items. As this form of input corresponds to what most L2 learners expect, learners' representations of languages and language learning may be considered as reflective of this type of classroom. As Holec (1996) puts it, these mental representations are "ideés reçues" or ideas that learners have acquired during the course of their school life.

In the learning-to-learn programme, learners are brought to confront these mental representations. My first example shows evidence that such a programme opens learners to alternative ways of thinking about the nature of language and language learning.

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1 By Brodow/Hjortén, Dreyer, Oslo, 1976. 1A is text number 1 and 2C is text number 9 in the textbook. The teacher chose to provide the students with dictionaries and authentic text material instead of spending the allocated money on a new textbook. A range of different textbooks were collected and put in the classroom resource centre.

Text 1
Text competence – a starting point in the foreign language classroom?
(This example is based on text models from the textbook *On y va.*[1])

Text model 1. 1A

Bonjour
Bonjour, Christine!
Ah, salut, Marianne! Ça va?
Ça va bien, merci. Et toi?
Ça va.

Text model 2. 2C

Je suis d'ici
I: A Nice, sur la plage
Alain: Salut, je m'appelle Alain, Alain Rolet.
Michel: Moi, je m'appelle Michel, Michel Dival.
Alain: Tu es d'ici?
Michel Non, je suis de Brest. Et toi, tu es d'ici?
Alain: Oui, je suis d'ici.

II: A Bordeaux, dans un café
Jean: Bonjour, je m'appelle Jean, Jean Bernard.
Suzanne: Moi, je m'appelle Suzanne, Suzanne Charbon.
Jean: Vous êtes d'ici?
Suzanne: Non, je suis de Strasbourg. Et vous, vous êtes d'ici?
Jean: Oui, je suis d'ici.

The assignment suggested was: "Use the models and write a parallel text."

After some hesitation, two of the learners asked if they were allowed to write anything they liked as long as it was a parallel text. The answer was: "Yes, of course!" They then wrote the following text:

DIALOG AV ISABELLE OG URSULE

Isabelle: Bonjour. Je m'appelle Isabelle. Comment est-ce tu t'appelle?

Ursule: Ah, salut, Isabelle. Je m'appelle Ursule. D'où es-tu?
Isabelle: Je ' suis de Paris. Et toi?
Ursule: Je ' suis de Marsielle. Comment ça va!
Isabelle: Oui! Et toi, ça va?
Ursule: Oui! Comment çi, comment ça.
Isabelle: Je vois que tu es sans dents à la soixantaine!
Ursule: Oui. Je vas à la clinique dentaire. J'aurez la dentier. Je vous la carie dentaire.
Isabelle: Ah, Ah!! Toi brave. Toi le de mauvais augure! Bonne chance!!
Ursule: Merci! A bientôt!
Isabelle: Au revoir!

The students made a translation for the teacher in case she "might have difficulties in understanding":

Oversettelse [Translation]

Isabelle: God dag. Mitt navn er Isabelle. Hva heter du?
Ursule: Åh, hei! Jeg heter Ursule. Hvor kommer du fra?
Isabelle: Jeg kommer fra Paris. Enn du da?
Ursule: Jeg kommer fra Marsielle. Går det bra med deg?
Isabelle: Ja. Og du. Går det bra med deg og?
Ursule: Ja, sånn opp og ned.
Isabelle: Jeg ser du er blitt tannløs i en alder av seksti år.
Ursule: Ja, jeg skal til tannlegeklinikken, og få meg gebiss. Jeg har tannråte.
Isabelle: Åh, Åh!!! Du er tapper. Og en ulykkesfugl! Lykke til!!!
Ursule: Takk. Vi snakkes.
Isabelle: Au revoir (crossed out.) På gjensyn.

The open learning situation – What the learners produced surprised the teacher, since she had expected them simply to replace personal names and place-names and then reproduce the words and expressions from the model dialogues according to the learning objectives defined by the textbook:

- the difference between "vous" and "tu";
- expressions like "D'où es-tu?" – "Vous êtes d'ici?" – "Ça va? Ça va" – "Je m'appelle, et vous?"

- vocabulary;
- the existence of cédille (ç), apostrophes, accents;
- how to address unknown people.

The lesson was intended to make the learners repeat the linguistic items in the correct form by modelling their output on the given texts. In short, they were supposed to produce a parallel text. But the two girls in question had not submitted to the task. Not only had they perverted the communicative situation, they had also neglected the necessity of reproducing correctly the linguistic elements dealt with in the models. On top of this, they had given themselves a task far beyond their level of French that inevitably led to incorrect language production. Was this triple transgression a provocation?

On the other hand, the teacher had decided to open up the learning situation as a first step towards introducing the self-directed learning scheme. "The open learning situation" is defined as open to the individual learning process of each learner and is considered as an alternative to teaching differentiation and adapted teaching (Trebbi 1996). Basically, this teacher had confidence in her learners and in their willingness to learn French. She felt that her own mental representations of the learners and their learning of French were being questioned. She therefore asked the two learners themselves about their work. They said: "We found the dialogues quite absurd. So we made a parallel text that was even more absurd. We had great fun and learned a lot!"

This brings us to our first conclusion, namely that open learning situations are not only open to the learning of the students but are also open for the teacher to learn about learning. In this particular case, the general text competence the learners draw on derives from their mother tongue. As beginners in French, they are "linguistically blind", but they are certainly not blind to genre. On the contrary, the model texts make them protest: "The language has gone empty! Conversations simply do not work like that." A closer look at the text produced by these learners may tell us more about the way they tackled the task.

Approaches to reading learner texts – There are different possible approaches to reading learner texts. One is to focus on the semantico-morphological level in relation to target language norms. A whole series of errors then becomes apparent, ranging from wrong spellings to grammatical mistakes and the misuse of language functions. Some examples are: "Je' suis – je vas – le de mauvais augure", and the sequence "Comment ça va? Oui". This focus on errors is perhaps characteristic of

a standard pedagogical approach to dealing with written texts produced by beginners. It is based on the assumption that correct L2 use develops when learners begin by acquiring formal knowledge about the target language.

However, from our point of view a more interesting approach would be to ask what type of text this is. Obviously, it seems to be a parody of the model dialogues. Let us consider the model dialogues. They display grammar rules, vocabulary and language functions in a specific situation. From the teacher's point of view, the model texts provide learners with information about the French language. What then makes them seem absurd to the learners? The learners do not seem to take much interest in the displayed items at this stage. Instead, they focus on meaning. They wonder: Why do these people speak to one another? Where are they? What is the object of the conversation? However, no clues are given in answer to these questions and no relevant situational context is provided. The problem the learners face is that these sample pieces of language do not focus on meaning, although the interpretation of the words and expressions are clear enough on the indexical level. The model texts are purely sample dialogues which are intended to concentrate learners' attention on the indexical level, and provide beginners with indexical information about the French language.

But the learners, who look for relevance, react against this. They are no doubt aware of the role that sample dialogues like these are meant to play in the L2 classroom, and how they as learners are meant to engage with such texts. Nevertheless, they choose to draw on their L1 competence instead and opt out of the standard learning situation which they find boring. They are put off by the rigidity of the samples and decide to go against the pedagogical conventions of this type of text and against conventional learner behaviour. Since the teacher has decided not to control their learning, they orient themselves differently from what is expected, feeling free to do something unusual – namely, to behave not as conventional language learners but as readers. The term "reader" is here used in the sense of "the active, inventive reader" (Eco 1987). As readers, they react to the model texts by supplying their knowledge about the world, their situational knowledge and their knowledge of genre. It turns out that there is a divergence between their own understanding of reality and the image of reality presented by the texts, even if their cultural understanding is not here at stake.

From this alternative point of view, the learners engage with the style

and rhetorical level of the model texts. This is a position from which they can participate in constructing the meaning of the texts, and they conclude that the meaning is absurd. Instead of confining themselves to paralleling the indexical interpretation, they focus on the illocutionary aspect of the texts and choose to make a point of their absurdity, which, in their opinion, lies in their lack of reference to reality. In the version they create, they parallel the style of the models and transform this textual feature into even greater absurdity by having people who are obviously total strangers talk about rotten and false teeth and their old age. The outcome is a text that violates the conventions of the sociocultural context in which it is assumed to be embedded. By producing this text, the learners achieve a double objective. First, they succeed in expressing their opinion of the model texts, and secondly, they take advantage of the opportunity to explore the unknown language. They look up vocabulary in the dictionary and experiment with meaning on both the lexical and textual levels. From a learning-to-learn perspective, they create their own "learning space" (Trebbi 1996). They are no longer bored because they are doing something that is relevant to them. By violating conventional learner behaviour, they succeed in being creative and not simply reproducing given language forms.

Looking at the text they produce, we may guess that the learners have to adopt the position of readers in order to be able to understand. The process of understanding requires them to construct a contextual relationship. As argued by Vygotsky (1986), comprehension emerges from social interaction. As soon as the students change their stance from that of learner to reader in order to make sense of the models, the static sample dialogues no longer exist as such; they are not taken as a "fait accompli" by the students. They trigger instead an exciting exploration of lexical meaning, and of the possibilities of structure, form and genre. The learners give themselves the necessary space to persevere with something they know they have not mastered. They are not afraid of making mistakes when trying out hypotheses about what is possible in French. Here the Norwegian translation they provide offers some clues to their thinking. One example is the meaning of "de mauvais augure" which they have translated as "ulykkesfugl" (in English, bad omen, or literally "bird that brings misfortune"), an unexpected and old-fashioned word. They may have looked up "uflaks, uheldig" (unfortunate) but found "de mauvaise augure" and consequently opted for this different meaning as indicated by the Norwegian translation. Furthermore, they

have noticed the cédille but do not yet know its appropriate use. However, this does not stop them from trying. Some verbs are conjugated correctly and others are overlooked. The learners seem to have the attitude that they cannot pay attention to everything at the same time. Some of their hypotheses seem to be grounded in assumed analogies with observations they have already made, such as in the following cases:

1. ça/ çi
2. Ça va? Oui. /Comment ça va? Oui.
3. comme ci/comment ci

If the text they produce communicates, this is due not to accuracy but to competence on a level that is usually considered more difficult to master – namely, the rhetorical level.

A double perspective – As reader, one does not look for meaning at the indexical level of language since meaning is not a constituent ingredient of language as such, but rather a potentiality of language activated through language use in a particular context. Reading is one instance of language use. Through processes of interpretation, the reader reconstructs the context necessary for understanding the text.

In the model dialogues, what little there is to be understood can only be understood in one sense. The piece of language presented is simply to be accepted as information. For our two learners, however, concern about the indexical level is second to concern about meaning, although lexical meaning is part of the textual meaning. In general terms, this might lead us to surmise that beginners are not apt to take the grammarian's perspective (Goffman 1981) without maintaining the user's perspective. Moreover, from the text which these learners produce, it seems that a continuous movement back and forth between the two perspectives is necessary. Lexical meaning and textual meaning are interrelated and interdependent. Somehow meaning can only be grasped from inside the language. The sample models do not work because they are reducible to lexical meaning. From their L1 competence, the learners know that there is more to text than the sum total of the words, and that this is what makes text meaningful. The question then is how this double perspective may be dealt with in the L2 classroom. This first example of learner text shows one approach: experimentation. Even as beginners, the two learners dare to engage with the unknown language as language users. The text they produce is evidence that this is possible, even if their understanding falls short. For example, in putting "le" in front of "de mauvais augure", they show that they have not adequately understood this expression they have

found in the dictionary.

Their idea of translating the text into Norwegian in case the teacher does not understand what they really mean tells us that they are well aware of the deficiencies in their French, even if they have looked "everything" up in the grammar book and dictionary. They know that there might be things which they have overlooked. However, this does not frustrate them, perhaps because they know something about what it is to learn a language, and also because they are not in a situation where the teaching objectives are at odds with their learning project. Even in the mother tongue, one has to take time to understand, and to observe language items in different contexts to reveal meaning. This underpins the argument about the interplay between the two perspectives. It also leads to the further argument that the problem of understanding can only be adequately dealt with if it is taken as an ongoing lifelong process of growth. The next example will further illustrate this point.

Text 2
Comparison through translation – different languages, same message

My second example presents a comparative perspective on languages. As a starting point in learning French, the learner in question says she wants to see what the new language looks like. She is looking for a global view and not the fragments presented in a sample text. For this purpose, she thinks it might be useful to observe language entities in French and Norwegian that are comparable. She chooses the following excerpt from the Bible which she finds written in both languages, and then makes a detailed copy.

Jean 14.

12. C'est ici mon commandement: Aimez-vous les uns les autres, comme je vous ai aimés
13. Il n'y a pas de plus grand amour que de donner sa vie pour ses amis.
14. Vous êtes mes amis, si vous faites ce que je vous commande.
15 Je ne vous appelle plus serviteurs parce que le serviteur ne sait pas ce que fait son maître: mais je vous ai appelés amis, parce que je vous ai fait connaître tout ce que j'ai appris de mon Père.
17 Ce que je vous commande, c'est de vous aimer les uns les autres

Joh 14.
12 Dette er mitt bud: Dere skal elske hverandre, som jeg har elsket dere. 13 Ingen har større kjærlighet enn den som gir sitt liv for sine venner. 14 Dere er mine venner hvis dere gjør det jeg befaler dere. 15 Jeg kaller dere ikke tjenere, for tjeneren vet ikke hva hans herre gjør. Men jeg kaller dere venner, for jeg har sagt dere alt jeg har hørt av min Far. 17 Dette er mitt bud: Elsk hverandre

This approach means that the learner is freed from the usual experience of "struggling" with meaning in a foreign language. The meaning is already there. She wants space to concentrate her attention on the indexical level. In this example, the linguistic context is known and the availability of background knowledge is not a problem. The learner argues that this makes it easier to focus on interpretation at the indexical level. The chosen text is ideal for this purpose since it has the same message, structure and reference in both languages. Differences are easily pointed out by the learner herself and can be discussed.

But an interesting thing then happens. Although her purpose is to observe how a familiar text is represented in the new words and sounds of the French language, the learner finds herself compelled to consider the meaning of the text when written in French. She is obliged to take into account a double perspective on the construction of meaning and to consider the problem of translation. For instance, in verse 13 the French "Il n'y a pas de" is given as "ingen har" (nobody has) in Norwegian. There is a discrepancy of meaning on the lexical level which, to the surprise of the inexperienced learner, contributes differently to the same textual meaning in the two languages. Furthermore, "appris"[2] in French is "hørt" (heard) in Norwegian. The learner observes these linguistic elements and wonders if the Norwegian "hørt" has the connotation of "appris". This comparison with the French word triggers the learner's interest in the semantic field of "hørt" and "lært" (learned) and the distinction between the two. Inspired by its French counterpart, the learner is thus led to examine the Norwegian word itself, and experiences how words are open to different connotations in different languages. Does she also see that this is true even across texts in her

2 The learner happened to know the word "appris" from another context. The teacher used to ask the class what they had done and what they had learned ("appris").

mother tongue?

What makes us able to communicate? The answer is, a set of extremely complex processes comprising thinking, understanding, manipulating sounds, letters and words, creating and using texts. In this sense, languages are two-faced: they are extroverted and introverted. They relate both to the social world and to individual inner factors. Language is both conventional and personal, bound by constraints and open to possibilities. However, learners do not easily notice the conventional aspects of their own language. We are born into a language and we learn it as part of the process of growing up. Identity and a sense of belonging are established through mother tongue acquisition and give us the feeling of being in the language. It is less obvious to us that, in order to understand, we sometimes also need to step back and reflect on language from a metalinguistic perspective, even when we are using our mother tongue.

When we look for words and concepts in another language, the process of comparing and translating obliges us to think about our own language. When L2 model texts are limited to sample dialogues and sample sentences that learners are expected to accept, submit to and merely reproduce, learners do not experience the excitement of trying out and developing further their own understanding and text competence.

Text 3

Code – meaning – significance

In this discussion so far, I have used the terms indexical and textual meaning. Paul Ricoeur has developed a further concept which is of interest to us in the present context – the concept of signification (Ricoeur 1976). Signification indicates a different level of comprehension which is distinctive from the meaning of the text in the sense that it relates to the reaction of the reader to this meaning. In this example, we pay attention to the significance of the meaning to the reader.

Text model [3]

LE POISSON NAGE
LES PLANTES POUSSENT

3 Høst, *Fransk for begynnere*, Utgave C., Aschehoug, Oslo, 1962.

L'OISEAU VOLE
LE TEMPS FUIT
L'HOMME PENSE
Que fait le feu?
Que font les étoiles?

Je pense, donc je suis. (Descartes)

One particular learner uses these sentences as the components of a construction kit and makes the following text:

Pollution

Les plantes poussent
mais poussent-ils dans vingt ans?
les oiseaux volent
mais volent-ils dans vingt ans?
le ciel est bleu
mais est-il bleu dans vingt ans?
les poissons nagent
mais nagent-ils dans vingt ans?
les animaux vivent
mais vivent-ils dans vingt ans?
les hommes pensent
mais fairent-ils ce, véritablement
Pas assez ...

The model text looks like sentences added one after the other. The learner chooses and organizes the sentences and establishes new relations between them in a way that makes evident a new signification. As many of the sentences are copied almost exactly as they are presented in the model, there is a sense in which this text is an instance of plagiarism. It is superfluous to mention here the role of plagiarism in relation to intertextuality. What makes this issue interesting to us is how plagiarism can be justified in the L2 classroom for its learning potential. The learner in question manages to structure the sentences by using a form or genre that is obviously familiar to her from her L1. The meaning of the original sentences changes through her reading of the model text, and through what she writes this new signification is brought clearly into existence.

This example illustrates the importance of the interplay between reading and writing. The learner's subjective reading or interpretation of the original text is revealed in the text she produces. A certain distance is established through which the signification is made plain to us and to the author herself. The process of writing both reflects and stimulates understanding. In this example, we notice a reflective movement from reading to writing and back to reading again. What the learner writes includes and excludes information which she acquires through her reading of the original text and through its signification to her. One instance of this is the sentence "Le temps fuit", which is excluded on the surface level of the text she produces, but which may nevertheless be regarded as a key idea in what she writes. Understanding is seen as a productive process of contextualization entailing the unfolding and working out of meaning. You choose one word, try it out, match it to your thought; then you may find another word and think that you might use this one instead, but only if it embodies a thought that you like better or find more appropriate, or that brings you to consider familiarities or make discoveries. This kind of reflective operation is likely to be more consciously carried out in the L2 classroom where it happens over and over again as an inherent part of the L2 learning process. From the L1 perspective, this may be viewed as a gain. One might argue that L2 learning makes the language "visible", and that this may influence language awareness as a whole, including awareness of one's own mother tongue and culture.

Conclusion

We have explored learner texts dealing with different issues in the process of L2 learning, in order to consider some aspects of an assumed mutual relationship between L1 and L2 learning. From this exploration, we can notice first of all that such a relationship does exist. We notice that although the learners we have studied are beginners and in the initial stages of their course, they choose to focus on both lexical and textual meaning, and on genre, style and signification. We can further observe that, in doing this, the learners draw on mother tongue experiences in relation to text competence, understanding as a process, general linguistic, pragmatic and cultural awareness, and specific reference knowledge. One might even claim that 14-year-old beginners are able to approach the new language from varied angles and master more than we are usually prepared to recognize.

We should also remark that not only does L1 text competence influence L2 learning, but that L2 learning in turn has an important role in raising learners' consciousness of their mother tongue and culture through the process of decentring from the known to the unknown.

Finally, we have stated that the examples discussed derive from open learning situations, where learning is not constrained through teacher control and where learners are thus encouraged to respond freely to the interaction between reading and writing. Open learning situations offer learners the opportunity to choose suitable approaches for their learning without having to conform to the expectations of the teacher. In making these choices, learners move beyond the realm of their traditional representations of foreign language learning.

From this position, we might ask how these experiences should be viewed in the light of pedagogical theory. This question lies beyond the scope of the present paper, but the three examples discussed above lead me to make the following points. My first contention is that we have to rethink what we mean by difficulty in L2 learning. Many aspects that are traditionally viewed as difficult turn out to be relatively easy. Generally speaking, learners of this age may be novices as grammarians but quite experienced as readers and writers. Immersed in one language already, they have to a large extent mastered the more composite and complex aspects of language use. In short, we need to take their text competence into account and look upon our students not only as language learners but also as language users.

This leads to the argument that authentic texts are no less important to beginners than to advanced L2 learners. Sample texts illustrating points of grammar and structure or expressions and functions may be useful later in the course. But whereas sample texts demonstrate the abstract code, authentic texts show the language as a communicative event and thus offer far more possibilities for contextualization and signification.

My second contention is that models of L2 learning that attempt to justify a predefined sequencing of exposure to input and corresponding learning outcomes for all learners need to be modified, given our observations of what learners actually do when they take charge of their own learning. As learning progresses, learners correspondingly change their learning focus. They work out their own sequencing of learning items according to their own preoccupations and new insights. Here, the question of developing learner autonomy comes into play. When the

teacher sequences the learning items on behalf of the learner, she runs the risk of creating learning situations that make the language subject opaque. As a result, learners become more dependent on the teacher. Some learners succeed in playing the teacher's game, either because they are familiar with the culture of these learning situations, or because they manage to learn no matter what the obstacles, though in an implicit way. However, we have reason to believe that predefined or "closed" learning situations help to make foreign languages inaccessible to a considerable number of learners. When learners themselves devise the sequencing (which is what successful learners implicitly do), they act according to what they feel to be beneficial to them in the process of learning. Acting in this way should not be a random process. A strong argument for developing learner autonomy is to make this potential process explicit to all learners and to deal with it in a deliberate and structured way.

This implies a change in the teacher's role in the sense that she is no longer in a position to sanction her learners' language use. Rather, her task is to support the learners in their efforts to make optimal use of their individual learning potential. This is a position from which the teacher may herself learn about her students' learning, and consequently become even more adept at engaging with their meaning as well as with the meanings that are given to them. She must relate and react to the meanings of her learners, instead of rejecting their performances as reflections of inefficient strategies or "bad learning". In this way, she opens the learning situation to explicit work with meaning. This in turn links to individual processes of understanding, and thus gives rise to the potential for substantial new achievements both in L1 and in L2 learning.

This brings me to my last claim, which is that L1 and L2 classrooms should have as a common objective the goal of letting learners observe and experience the flexibility of the system of signification from an individual and cultural perspective. In other words, L1 and L2 learning should be built into a continuum of complementary and cross-referenced learning experiences.

4 Text competence and the interrelationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning

Anne-Brit Fenner

Linguistic theories about the L1–L2 relationship have tended to focus on errors in the target language. Error analysis has been mainly concerned with processes of linguistic transfer from the mother tongue to the foreign language. Various types of fossilization have been analysed, especially fossilization that seems to arise as a result of features in the learner's native language. However, there has been little emphasis on the learner's first language competence and aspects of this competence which are helpful when coping with the process of learning a foreign language. Focusing upon such aspects might enable us to see what the learner is capable of doing rather than what the learner has problems with while using the target language.

Interlanguage theory (Selinker 1972, Corder 1967) is closely linked with psycholinguistic theories and error analysis. Research in this field has concentrated on the notion of "communicative performance". As a result of such theories, teachers have focused on errors and mistakes that learners make, which can be traced back to their native language. Interlanguage theory has enabled us to interpret and understand the reason why some mistakes are made, but it has not necessarily had a positive impact on the way teachers regard and assist the individual's language learning process. Research in contrastive analysis has mainly been concerned with the linguistic aspects of communicative competence, rather than with learner text as a whole. Instead of using interlanguage theory to enable us to help learners in their learning, most research has focused on the shortcomings of the learner. Because interlanguage theory focuses on errors at word and sentence level, it is not very useful as a tool if we want to analyse the learner's text as a whole.

This is also the case with another line of research, that of contrastive rhetoric. The focus here has been on structural problems that L2 students have in learning to cope with, for instance, academic writing. Contrastive rhetoric, although focusing on discourse competence, is mainly concerned with specific features in the writing of groups of language learners, comparing one nationality with another, in order to discover specific national cultural traits in, for instance, text structure. Much of this research has been carried out with learners at a fairly advanced

language level. Learner-produced L2 texts have been analysed from the point of view of understanding why learners from different nationalities structure their texts in different ways (Connor 1996). Contrastive rhetoric studies are interesting culturally and linguistically, but if we want to focus on the written text as a unity of form and meaning, this line of research cannot provide the necessary support. There seems to be no line of research which has been concerned with those aspects of mother tongue competence which can assist the learner when using the target language, and might even mutually enhance text competence in both the target language and the mother tongue.

In this section, I want to examine three texts written by 13 and 14-year-old Norwegian learners of English, in order to focus on the above-mentioned perspective which seems to be missing in language learning research. These learners have been studying English for five to six years in mixed ability classes. The overall aim of foreign language learning in Norway is to acquire communicative competence, defined as consisting of a certain number of partial competences. Until the national curriculum was replaced in 1997, developing these competences was defined in terms of learning the four skills, particular grammatical features and linguistic functions, and acquiring a certain knowledge of British and American culture. In the new national curriculum emphasis is put on text competence rather than the four skills.

The three learner texts were produced in an autonomous learning environment where there was an emphasis on giving the learners a certain personal scope in order to develop as language learners and users. What happens to learning and, in this case, the development of text competence, under such learning conditions? Does an autonomous learning environment open up new possibilities for the teacher to really see what the learners are doing? The three texts are analysed from different angles. In the first one the focus is on different aspects of mother tongue text competence which support the structure of the text. In analysing the second text, the emphasis is on the support or "scaffolding" provided by model texts, and how the models influence the linguistic level as well as the text level. In the third text, the analysis focuses on language as meaning and on how the learner's text competence is enhanced by the awareness of a complex relationship between form and meaning. In the investigation of all three texts, it is assumed that a text is a complete entity with form and meaning as one, and that it must be regarded as such by the teacher.

A piece of written language by a learner of English gives us the necessary data for interlanguage analysis. As stated earlier, traditional interlanguage studies have not been concerned with the text as an entity, the macrostructure, but have focused on individual words or sentences. This is not, however, how learners perceive a text. When L2 learners are asked to write or speak, they focus on meaning, not primarily on individual words or language functions. Reproductive tasks in the L2 classroom might stress such items, but if learners are given the necessary freedom to *produce* language rather than *reproduce* it, in an authentic dialogue with the text or other persons, their focus will necessarily be on meaning. Like everyone else, foreign language learners, given the chance, will use language to express meaning, however difficult it is for them to find the words and fit them together in order to express this meaning: "Because we are in the world, we are sentenced to meaning" (Lindhardt 1987). When the objective in the L2 classroom is to assist the development of language users rather than to give instruction, the focus will necessarily be on interpretation and language as an expression of meaning.

Unless we examine the learner's text as a whole, we will miss essential aspects of the learner's text competence and, if we regard language as meaning, essential aspects of the learner's language competence. By analysing complete texts written by L2 learners, we are able to discover text competence beyond learners' linguistic competence. It is also in the investigation of complete texts that one can discover how learners utilize their L1 text competence when writing a text in a foreign language, or even use the foreign language to discover features of their native language or culture.

Traditionally, the teaching of English in Norwegian schools has emphasized reading coursebook texts, performing linguistic exercises, especially with a focus on grammatical features and language functions, and writing texts. Generally learners do not practise much creative writing in class. A lot of their writing is done as homework with no guidance from the teacher. Classroom time is spent explaining linguistic features of the target language and answering questions dealing with the content of shorter textbook texts, mainly created for specific pedagogical purposes. Nevertheless, most Norwegian learners at the age of 14 are fairly competent in writing texts in English. Even without being taught how to structure a text in English lessons, a large majority of learners can cope with a plotted story.

How do they achieve such competence? Where do learners learn to

write fictional texts in English? I do not believe the answer can be found within the narrow limits of the English language classroom. It is necessary to look outside (Illich 1979). Most teenagers spend a lot of their spare time watching television, films, videos and playing with computer games. Many of them are preoccupied with action films and soap operas. In Norway these are shown with subtitles and are not dubbed. Thus the young viewers are provided with models of plots as well as models of the foreign language, which in most cases are English, American or Australian. Norwegian television programmes are in many ways inferior to the Anglo-American programmes, certainly in the eyes of the young viewer. Through the media they receive daily doses of the target language used in films with a lot of action and dialogue.

Another source is the knowledge of text and composition which learners gain in their mother tongue lessons. In their Norwegian classes they read literature and they write extensively. They learn about genres and how to structure texts. Over the past ten years or so there has been a change in the way reading is organized for this age group. They read books written for young people and they read a lot during concentrated periods. The teaching is not only concerned with the Norwegian literary canon, which is not very accessible to the young Norwegian reader, but with extensive reading for enjoyment. This experience provides young learners with model texts from their native language. In relation to L1 reading, however, the weakest learners tend to read less than the more able learners. Yet, when it comes to watching films and videos in the foreign language, this is not necessarily the case, although recent research shows that successful school learners watch a lot of television in addition to doing homework and being active in spare-time activities. They are also good at adapting one field of knowledge to another and thus make use of their knowledge to a greater extent than less able learners. The fact remains, however, that most learners of English are surrounded by model texts, in the broad sense of the word, outside school.

A general impression one gets is that in lower secondary school, imagination and creativity seem to be more widely employed in the learners' writing of English than in their writing of Norwegian. I believe there are five main reasons for this. First, in Norwegian lessons they meet the requirements of "adult" writing at this level, and they interpret this as something non-creative. Secondly, the types of texts they are asked to write in English are stories, often stories that they plot with a lot of action in accordance with their models. Compared with the tasks they are given

in their Norwegian lessons, the written tasks in English are less restrictive and, consequently, more adaptable to learners' imagination. Thirdly, the genre requirements are less strict, and less emphasis is put on formalities of structure. The main requirement is for learners to show their written communicative competence. Fourthly, the learners find most of their models in English. They watch far more English-speaking films than Norwegian ones. Fifthly, the use of the foreign language itself enables learners to take on a different "personality", to identify with English-speaking models and feel less confined within the limits of the native language and culture. To many young learners, English is a language of excitement and action, and when they write, their writing seems to be more vivid than when they write in Norwegian.

In order for learners to employ fully the text competence they obtain from "life" and mother tongue school experience, they need a certain freedom. If the foreign language tasks are too narrow, there will be no room for learners to make use of their preknowledge and pre-existing text competence, consciously or unconsciously. A certain intertextuality is always there, but there must be sufficient scope for learners to personalize the task. Learners have to be able to find room for their own experience, imagination and knowledge. In a classroom where communication is inauthentic and monologic, consisting of encoding or decoding language, there is little room for personalized foreign language texts.

As I have stated previously, the three examples of learner texts that I have chosen to examine were all produced in a setting of learner autonomy where emphasis was put on giving learners sufficient freedom to produce creative language. The first and the third texts are examples of fiction, the second one is a piece of prose writing. The linguistic level varies greatly from one text to the next. The first example, *Storm*, is written by a 13-year-old learner. He finds the learning of English difficult and has a very limited command of the language. Faced with an empty page, he finds it hard to think of what to write, whether in his mother tongue or in English.

Before writing texts about storms, the learners had read a short textbook story about a hurricane and had looked at a few texts and maps on the Internet about hurricanes. The task given was simply to write a text called *Storm* in a genre of the learner's own choice. One might argue that it is easier for L2 learners if the task is less open to personal interpretation. In such a case they would not have to focus on content,

structure, and the difficulty of finding words and sentences in the foreign language all at once. My experience, however, is that it is vital that learners can take part in these decisions. Only thus can they relate the task to their own thinking and feel that the text is personally relevant. Through the process of planning and writing the text, learners also develop their own personal language.

Storm

> First quiet. Then it starat blowing, more and more. Trees swaying in the wind. How will it end? The sea is white, the waves hit against the beach. Will the boats be ok? It blowing more and more. Nobody can move outside. We are sitting inside and locks out. A crash, the electricity is gone. Why? A big tree has fallen over the electricitycable. It is good we have a lot of wood inside. It is only to lit the fireplace and find the candles.

The linguistic shortcomings of the text are obvious. Assessed from the lowest textual level, that of linguistic and lexical errors, it is not a good text (Skjelbred 1992). But if assessed purely from this point of view, we miss everything that makes it an interesting text. On the other hand, if we regard it from an angle where we look for what the writer-learner is capable of doing rather than what he is incapable of, we will come to a different conclusion; the text might even be considered quite a good story.

First of all, we might ask what type of text this is. It seems to be an account of what happens during a storm, given the narrative framework. There are several lexical and grammatical errors in the text. But despite mistakes, the text communicates with the reader, conveying meaning. The strong points in this text, however, are not primarily to be found on the basic text levels, but in the rhetoric. The text has an Aristotelian understanding of plot, with a beginning, a middle and an end, where characters are subordinate to the plot. In two words, "First quiet", the writer states the situation and creates an atmosphere of suspense and expectation of more to come. Already in the next sentence he has created meaning that contrasts sharply with the first sentence. The writer is preoccupied with conveying a sense of action to the reader, and the drama of the action increases rapidly. There is also a turning point in the plot. The use of rhetorical questions such as "How will it end?" and

"Will the boats be ok?" moves the action forward. This type of question and the function that the questions have of creating suspense, can be recognized as the rhetorical questions of soap opera. Before the action becomes dangerously dramatic, the characters, "we", are safely moved inside. Typical for this writer's age group is the demand for a happy ending. In this case it consists of the nice, cosy Norwegian feeling of safety and comfort in a lit candle, indoors, when the weather becomes too severe outside. At the end of this text, problems are resolved and harmony is restored.

The text can also be regarded as a good story because of its inherent genre characteristics. The writer shows himself in command of these text requirements, despite his seemingly limited mastery of the foreign language. It might even be interpreted that his lack of linguistic competence assists his text competence on the levels of discourse and rhetoric. His rhetorical question "Why?" following "A crash, the electricity is gone" would probably not be used by this learner in a Norwegian narrative text. In his mother tongue he would have felt this to be too limited a "sentence" as he would have been taught to use complete sentences in his writing. With his restricted command of English, however, he perhaps feels that this word will have to suffice when formulating a question. Another instance in the text where there is a marked difference between the way he expresses himself in the L2 and what could be expected in his L1, is the sentence, "Trees swaying in the wind." This melodious sentence with alliteration would, by a boy his age, probably be considered too effeminate to employ in a piece of L1 writing. In the L2 he becomes braver and dares to express himself differently because he is not emotionally involved in the language to the same extent as he is when using his L1. This sense of distance is an interesting factor in L2 learning which learners need to become aware of, as it widens their scope and can be exploited to a greater extent. They feel less "responsible" for the emotional aspects of language when using the "otherness" of the foreign language.

The text is an interesting cultural phenomenon. Among other models, the learner has read a text about the American hurricane Flora. When he writes his own text about a storm, he transfers the action and the atmosphere to a typically Norwegian setting. The sea and the waves, the electricity being cut off, the log fire and the candlelight inside. The happy ending, consisting of the problems being resolved by a burning logfire and lit candles, is very Norwegian in character. The text is not

merely a description of a Norwegian storm and the effects it causes. It is a plotted narrative which, through the foreign language, expresses something essential about Norwegian culture. The writer has, as a reader of model texts, understood something about nature that is foreign to him. When he comes to plot his own story, he describes Norwegian nature briefly, but focuses on the effect this has on Norwegian culture. Through having to work carefully with each word and sentence in the L2, he gets a deeper understanding of his own culture. He has to examine the words in order to find expressions that will convey his meaning and what he feels.

"Storm" works well as a narrative text when it is analysed on what Skjelbred (1992) calls the text level. The learner's focus has been on telling a story and thus communicating meaning. Plotting the story about a storm and people's reactions to it in the L2 makes this learner aware of both language and its meaning. "Plot [. . .] is the logic and dynamic of narrative, and narrative itself a form of understanding and explanation" (Brooks 1992).

The text under discussion would traditionally be considered a "bad" text written by a weak learner. By analysing it on what Skjelbred (1992) calls the levels of text and of communication rather than on the levels of vocabulary and sentences, it is possible for L2 teachers to discover the strong positive features of the learner text rather than just linguistic and grammatical errors. The important implication here is that L2 learners must also be made aware of the fact that they already possess substantial text competence so that they can consciously employ this competence in the process of L2 learning. The particular text we have examined exhibits the strategies the learner is capable of employing, and the areas in which he can make progress. Because the learner thinks in terms of narrative and develops his thought through language, the context provided when using model texts and writing a story helps to develop his linguistic awareness as well as text competence. By looking for the strong points on higher textual levels than the purely linguistic level, we can help learners to make progress in their L2 learning.

The second text is of a very different nature. One of my main points here will be to show the use of models and to see how they influence the learner's text competence in the foreign language. The writer is a 15-year-old boy. The task is a fairly open one given within a framework of autonomous learning. The learners had worked with a number of texts about war. They had a certain amount of choice concerning which texts

to study. The following texts were available in the classroom: poems by Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen; a textbook story called *Christmas in Hell* from World War I; *The Good and the Bad* by Art Buchwald; "With God on Our Side" by Bob Dylan; "National Brotherhood Week" by Tom Lehrer; some letters from Vietnam written by American soldiers; and *The Secret Soldier* by Ann McGovern. The project also included Internet texts on war and peace movements, chosen by learners themselves. Each learner decided on a particular topic within the main theme. Apart from the English texts, some learners used Norwegian history book texts as additional source material. It was up to the learners to decide which genre to use.

The Cold War

After many years of battle, the Second World War finally ended. Over 50 million people died during this war, and all over the world, people celebrated the ending of all the fighting and killing across our planet. Of course, the USA had ended the war in a very brutal way, by dropping the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with just three days between, and with no warning at all, but people had no problem axcepting it, as long as the war really was over for good.

But once the war was over, another war started. A differend type of war, between the "east side" and the "west side" of the world, where the border line crossed Europe and split the European continent in two different parts. Sir Winston Churchill made a good description of the situation when he in 1946 uttered this ominous sentence: "From Stetting in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent". These words marked the beginning of the Cold War. Churchill's words referred to the fact that the Soviet Union, from 1945 to 1948, strengthened its hold on the east-Eurpoean countries.

The Cold War may be defined as a condition of competition, tension, and conflict short of actual war between the democratises (west side), with the United States in front, and the communists (east side), with the Soviet Union in front. Both sides used an enormous amount of communal resources on armament and developing new weapons.

The most frightening about the Cold War was that both the United States and the Soviet Union, after a while got enough weapons to destroy all life on earth many times, and they just kept on developing more, stronger, better and more dangerous weapons year after year. This also made them respect each other, and prevented an atomic war to break out.

There has been several less-than-total confrontations between superpowers such as the Berling Blockade of 1948-49 and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

The most visible symbol of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War was the Berlin Wall, a barricade begun in 1961 to discourage defections from the East to West Germany. The Berlin Wall split Germany in two quite differenct pieces; the West Germany, with its good economy, democracy, capitalism and support from the United States and the East Germay which were controlled by the Soviet Union's politics. Families, friends or couples were not allowed to visit each other from now on. Many people tried to escape over the wall, but very few succeeded. Some say that Germany was the country who suffered most during the Cold War, apart from the Korean War and the vietnam war.

The United States had military bases all over Europe, and was the superior force until 1957, when the Soviet Union put up the satellite named Sputnik and could reach the United States with nuclear weapons at any time. This was called "The Sputnik shock" all over the western world.

When the Cold War started to get to an end at the late 80's, the United States had come much further than the Soviet Union in weapon developing. If a possible atomic war broke out, the United States would definitively win it. The Soviet Union also had great economical problems as a direct result of their escalatin armouring. The disarmament agreement between the two "superpowers", The United States and the Soviet Union was to gain all parts, which now use their resources on other, more important things than weapons.

When the learners were asked to explain how they had worked, this

learner wrote as follows:

> I chose this subject because I know quite much about it. I got the information from a CD-ROM encyclopedia, my father and I also remembered a bit from my history lessons. I wrote it on the computer, so I easely could edit it directly.

He decided to write a piece of prose which resembles the genre article. Such a task would not usually be given by the teacher as it would be considered too difficult at this stage of L2 learning. It is therefore interesting that, when given a free choice of genre, the learner chooses a demanding one. The English textbook would not include texts of this kind, which means that the learner has to find his own models. These he finds mainly from his Norwegian history book and from a CD-ROM which he owns privately.

At first his text seems to be mostly quotations without quotation marks, but, fairly soon, flaws in the language show that most of the text is the learner's own creation. He has used quotations, but does not know how to mark them in a text. Some teachers would reject this as copying and not the learner's own work. This may be true of parts of it, but the text as a whole is decidedly the learner's own work. Apart from the linguistic errors, it is difficult to discern where the personal text ends and the quotations begin. If the learner had used only his own existing knowledge and what his history book said about this historic period, his text would probably have been stilted and would have carried signs of translation. This is discernible only in a few places. The text is highly influenced by his English model. He uses vocabulary and expressions from the model text. But he still manages to create a personal text on this topic of his choice. The model influences him in the sense that it lifts his level of language and text competence to a degree which would be inconceivable without the model. The learner has been given considerable freedom, which makes it possible for him to display an area of knowledge which interests him (and his father) and consequently motivates the writing of the text. The scope given also enables him to find models for a type of text he has not written before in the foreign language. Rather than criticizing him for staying too close to the model in certain parts of the text, it is important to see how his level of linguistic expression is enhanced. This can mainly be done by comparing this text to previous texts written by the same learner, but even without access to

such a comparison, the text itself shows the high level of text competence as well as linguistic competence that this learner possesses.

Another aspect of this text is that the learner has written it with reference mainly to English models. The structure and content of the text are quite different from his Norwegian history book which he also claims to have used as a model. His text is preoccupied with beginnings and endings; something is over and something new starts. The new period is described as a new beginning which people celebrate as heralding something better, and quite the opposite of what has gone before. Thus the text starts with a narrative of almost fictional quality which a history book would not contain.

Like the previous learner, this learner moves the "action" forward by using opposites:

> But once the war was over, another war started.

Opposites are reflected in the content of the factual text. The notion of a fictional genre rather than a factual one is enhanced by the writer's use of adjectives:

> and they just kept on developing more, stronger, better and more dangerous weapons year after year.

There is also a listing of nouns which creates a similar effect:

> with its good economy, democracy, capitalism and support from the United States.

The fictional quality is enhanced by emotions expressed in the text: e.g., "The most frightening about the Cold War was . . ." How people feel is an important aspect of the whole text. When he deals with the arms race, the learner again bases the structure on opposites. At the end of the text it is important for him to stress a happy ending. He feels a need to mark the end of the text, and like the various texts that this age group surround themselves with, it is a happy one. Again, this suggests the fictional quality of a plotted text.

As I have tried to show, the learner's language is heavily influenced by the models he employs in his writing. This "lifts" his L2 to a higher level than this learner would otherwise have been able to cope with. The

L2 model has also influenced the structure and the rhetoric of the text. His written communicative competence is on a much higher level than it would have been had he had access to his Norwegian textbook only. The vocabulary of the CD-ROM text is more advanced than that of his history book and the genre is a different one. Because the learner is working in a foreign language where almost all his previous linguistic models have been fictional, he manages to enrich his text with certain fictional qualities. The much stricter approach to studying text genres in his mother tongue would not have given him the same freedom within which to write his text. Given a much broader scope, he can make personal choices about genre and style and does not have to adhere to strict genre regulations. This fact makes his L2 text varied and interesting and, certainly, makes room for creativity and personality, not only in style, but also in the use of the L2.

The third text example is written by a girl of the same age as the previous learner. The classroom setting is still one where the learners have a wide freedom of choice. For the task in question, learners were given just a title, the same for the whole class. The point of this task was to see how the learners would interpret the one-word title and define their own content and genre. Before starting to write, they would have to decide upon their own personal meaning of the word, "The Box". Part of the objective was then to give them an opportunity to read one another's texts and to show them how varied their choice of genre and content could be. In this instance no specific text models were used.

The Box

She looked out of her window, and there they stood. The two men that symbolized all mothers' worst nightmare. She had seen them knock on many of her neighbours' doors. And now they were here, right outside her own door. She wanted to hide. Pretend that there were noone at home. Then she could continue living with her hope. . . . .

Maybe it was not her they wanted to talk to. Maybe they had picked the wrong door. But she knew it was no use and tried to hide her anxiety as she was driven towards the door.

Once she saw their faces and heard them say her name, she knew that her nightmare had come to stay. A living nightmare capable of

destroying every person it chose.

She did not hear what they said, she just saw one of the men's mouth forme the words, "I am so sorry to be the one who tells you this. But your son has perished. He died in a trench north in France. He was a very brave young man, who did all that he could for his country. A perfect soldier. Here, we want you to have this. Some of his last belongings and a photo of his grave."

Then they left, and she stood there all alone with a box in her hands. One by one she saw her neighbours disappear back into their own houses, relieved that it was not one of their own. At that very moment she hated them all for that sad look in their eyes, saying, "I'm so sorry," while they at the same time were so glad. She went inside, sat down at a chair, and opened the box. On top of it lay a letter adressed to herself. He had not had the time to mail it. How typical of Robert. Always so busy.

There were also a candy bar, some letters from her to him and a photo of a girl she had never seen. She opened the letter to herself, and felt the pain grow. . . . . He was to come home next week. He had got a grant to leave for a whole month because of something that had happened to him. But she was not to worry. He was all right! And he was looking forward to give her a big hug.

She saw the shape of her son disappear into the crowd of young men, waving good-bye to her at the station. And now he was gone? The words sounded as if he was on a vacation. Gone . . . . her eyes suddenly went empty and she floated into a trance. . . . .

Her little son. She could no longer touch him, no longer talk with him, or yell at him. No longer kiss or hug him. They would no longer sit on the veranda and laugh of all their strange neighbours. No longer drive him to a football game and watch him score. She would never ever see him again at all.

She could neither cry or scream. Something squeezed her chest so hard that she could not breathe, and the pain became more and more intolerable. She pressed the box into her chest to stop the pain

growing. Fore several minutes she just stood there shaking, gasping for air, while the pain sank into her soul. Then suddenly a loud scream filled the room, as her heart exploded, and she burst into tears.

The first thing the learner does before starting to write her text is to decide what the title means to her. She knows the lexical meaning of the word, but, in this context, it becomes obvious to the learner that it requires a personal interpretation. The dictionary or the teacher can only give options if asked for. The learners have to go beyond an immediate understanding, and really decide what type of box they want to base their text on. The girl who wrote this text has interpreted and given the word a rather surprising meaning. There is the immediate interpretation of a box as an object that contains something, but the plot is centred round the impact that the object causes. In a classroom where the learners have a chance to take charge of their own learning, individual interpretations of words and language have a chance of becoming apparent.

We all relate to the world around us as language. The words we use are not merely terms to classify our surroundings, but also our personal interpretations and meanings of the objects we name (Lindhardt 1987, p.20). By interpreting the word "box" the way this learner does, she gives the teacher as well as other readers an insight into her own interpretation of the meaning of the world around her and how she relates to it. If the classroom tasks are one-dimensional and inauthentic, of the "question-answer" type and not really dialogic, there is no room for learners to create meaning and use their own personal interpretation of language. The L2 classroom must open up to personal interpretations if learners are going to have a chance of relating personally to the language. Only then can the L2 become an expression of personality, interpretation and negotiation, and not just imitation and reproduction.

We may wonder why the learner chooses this particular theme for her text. Of course, learners lead lives both in the school context and outside it, and we can have access to their experience outside school only if they want to communicate it to us. This girl had had for some time a preoccupation with death and grief which was related to her personal experience. As a 14-year-old she was also preoccupied with war, but not, as the previous learner, the political aspect of war, but the personal, individual aspect. When dealing with the topic of war, literary texts had been brought into the classroom by the teacher in order to show that war

has a "personal" voice in literature. My belief is that literary genres in the L2 are sometimes easier for the 14-year-old learner to relate to than just factual prose. Literary texts also function as examples of personal interpretations of culture. The fact that the learner chooses World War I as her setting is surprising since Norwegian pupils learn very little about this particular war. Norway did not participate, and the topic is therefore passed over fairly quickly in history lessons and history books. The girl might, however, have seen films and television series on the topic. As stated earlier, the class had also read some war poets as part of a project earlier in the same school year.

She has chosen the short story as her genre. Up to this point, the class had learnt nothing about the short story in their English lessons. But they had done some work on this in their Norwegian lessons. Here is, therefore, another example of transfer of L1 text competence to the L2 learning process. Again, it is not competence primarily on the linguistic level, but on the level of communication. This learner's mastery of the genre becomes apparent already in the first sentence, where she employs the technique of *in media res*. Here is an L2 learner who creates a text which, if we ignore its linguistic mistakes, is on an L1 level. Because she is free to choose her own topic and genre, she can decide to write a text which on a textual level matches her L1 competence, and thus becomes a very demanding task in terms of her L2. The setting of her short story is one which is culturally very "foreign" to a Norwegian, especially a teenager. Still, she copes very well with the theme, because she generalizes it. She identifies with "all mothers" and enters the personal situation using literary tools that she has learnt to master through her reading and writing. Because her L2 learning is not controlled by the teacher and because she is not restricted to textbook texts as models, she can employ her personal experience and her entire text competence. The language does not become a barrier but a medium that opens up new cultural and personal understanding. Within the setting of war, she communicates a sense of general anxiety and pain and thus manages to write a text which conveys a particular example of a general feeling of grief.

In her short story she also deals with the understanding of language and of words, and with the failure of words to convey meaning. What is language like when it does not carry meaning?

She did not hear what they said, she just saw one of the men's mouth

forme the words [...].

Language is here partly presented as something visual: in certain circumstances there are words that do not exist as meaning. This demonstrates that the learner is aware that words are not just lexical items, but meaningful in context. She deals with a slow and gradual interpretation of meaning, and how different contexts affect people differently. The news about the death of the protagonist's son affects her in a totally different way from the way it affects her neighbours. They interpret the situation in relation to themselves: "At that very moment she hated them all for that sad look in their eyes, saying, 'I'm so sorry,' while they at the same time were so glad."

The learner's linguistic awareness again becomes apparent on a lexical level when she writes,

> And now he was gone? The words sounded as if he was on vacation. Gone . . .

Even as an L2 user she holds up this one word and tries to "sound it out"; she negotiates it and "tastes" its potential contextual meaning in a way that makes her relationship to the foreign language something far more than a process of translating her own thoughts into a series of words. This type of reflective action is characteristic of L2 learners who exhibit language awareness and who try out their hypotheses about language. The learner here visualises this process within the context of her text also to express the estrangement of the main protagonist in the short story. Here is a fictional person who is faced with a situation which seems unreal, a situation she is using words to understand and come to terms with. Parallel to this is the writer, the L2 learner, who is holding up a word in the foreign language in order to capture its real "emotional" meaning. Thus the word becomes subject to interpretation and association, and the learner as well as the fictional character can sense the multiplicity of the meaning. By interpreting words beyond their simple lexical meanings, reality is interpreted and understood, and language awareness develops as a process. The learner and the bereaved mother are both in the same position, the position of the "other", looking at something from the outside.

Conclusion

In this section I have analysed three texts written by young Norwegian learners of English, which in different ways shed light on various aspects of the interrelationship between mother tongue and foreign language. In the first example we looked at how a short text full of linguistic errors can provide us with an example of relatively advanced text competence, if analysed on a discourse rather than a linguistic level. It is only on this higher textual level that the learner's text competence, achieved through L1 learning and life experience, becomes visible. And by having freedom in the learning situation to shape his own text project, the learner can exhibit his competence.

The second example shows a text produced as a direct result of employing model texts chosen by the learner himself. The models provide the learner with support in his own text production. The way he uses the models requires a process of interpretation and negotiation. Thus the learner as reader and writer enters into an intertextual communication with the model texts and creates his own meaning. This process has a distinctive impact on his linguistic level in the L2 as well as his text competence in both L1 and L2.

The third example also shows how freedom to interpret and personalize a task allows the learner to exhibit her fairly advanced text competence. In her short story we have observed a complex dialectical relationship between L1 and L2. We are also faced with a piece of writing where cultural competence is an integral part of text competence. In her double role as reader and writer, the learner both interprets and questions meaning. The process of reading and writing a foreign language has made her aware of the fact that understanding the foreign culture as well as our own is a matter of interpreting language and trying to create meaning.

In all three texts the learners have exploited their freedom to create their own personal tasks and contexts. Through their personalized products they show different aspects of text competence. They have all based their projects on a fundamental understanding of language as meaning. It is of vital importance that we, as teachers, take such an understanding seriously, and try to see what the learner's intention is. In order to achieve this, we need to regard learner texts on higher levels than the basic linguistic level where we are often blinded by mistakes.

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